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ABSTRACT

Parental expectations and perceptions of curriculum content and processes were measured across five preschool programs in the Mt. Druitt Early Childhood Project. Twenty parents from each of the five programs (Cognitive, Competency, Contemporary, Behaviorist and Home-Based) were randomly selected to be interviewed. Interviews were partly open-ended and partly structured. The structured format consisted of a list of discrete child behaviors compiled to represent a range of goal behaviors for preschool age children. Parents were asked to rate each item on this Behavior Inventory at the beginning of the year in terms of those behaviors they most expected to be the goals for preschool and later in the year in terms of those which they thought had been influenced by the preschool program. Teachers were also asked to rate children on the Behavior Inventory and to rate the emphasis their programs had given to each of the areas. Overall results showed that parents expected preschool most of all to help children develop a range of social behaviors (cooperation, compliance) and then to help children develop certain cognitive/academic skills (communication, explanation, counting, prediction). Most ratings of the effects of preschool were high, although they were below what parents had expected. Results regarding parent expectations and perceptions as well as teacher ratings and program differences are reported, accompanied by partial data. A copy of the interview form and the Behavior Inventory are appended. (JMB)

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DISCUSSION PAPER

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Parents' Expectations-Perceptions

of Preschool
(P.E.P.I.)

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Within Australian educational practices there is an increasing awareness of the need to involve parents and the community more concertedly in the educational decision-making process. For far too long educational administrators have been the major decision-makers and interpreters of educational policy-making. Parents and the community have generally only had an indirect influence on policy-making through the election of their parliamentary representatives.

However, with the increasing awareness that parents and community members have legitimate and valuable contributions to make to the educational process, past practices are slowly changing. Ideally, preschools should provide a valuable opportunity to involve parents in educational as there appears to be greater involvement between parents and schools at this level than at any subsequent level of education.

The following report discusses parental perceptions concerning the value of their children's preschool educational experiences. As such the report constitutes an integral component of the evaluation model of the Project's activities; a component which is frequently overlooked in educational evaluations. The data within this discussion paper contains valuable information for teachers and educational administrators alike.

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Parents' Expectations-Perceptions of Preschool

(P.E.P.I.)

RATIONALE

In Australia early childhood services have recently received considerable attention. The whole area from basic forms and systems to specific programs and curricula has been actively examined and argued in the competing efforts for support. But little has been done to involve parents directly in the debate. Sometimes general surveys of needs and preferences of particular groups have provided information helping to make broad policy decisions (e.g., Burns et al., 1975, 1976), while others have assessed parents' reactions to parts of their programs (e.g., Ashby et al., 1975). Reflecting the strength of the movement towards increased parental participation in educational decision making a School and Community Project, funded by the Schools Commission, has been set up to collate and disseminate information about various strategies and programs which are in some ways responsive within the community. However, substantial investigations of parents' expectations and perceptions of such programs, such as the Schools Council (1976) "Survey of parents' views on education" or the action-research Berkely Preschool Parent/Staff Development Project (Messinger, Almy & Bagley, 1976), have not been undertaken. Particularly as the State moves further into the provision of early childhood services procedures for maximising their responsiveness to a broader family context need to be developed.

As part of a broad curriculum development and evaluation effort for the Mt. Druitt Early Childhood Project (Ball & Braithwaite, 1976) parents'

expectations and perceptions of preschool programs are significant components. Systematic incorporation of parental ideas in either goal formulation or evaluation has not been usual in the development and implementation of most educational programs.

The aim of developing a wider sensitivity to the whole question of evaluation requires more interactive and responsive procedures. These procedures should shift the formation of educational aims and strategies from prescription to negotiation, discarding the bluntness of past dogmatisms (the presumptuous conceptualisation of disadvantaged children as 'deficit systems' and the onslaught on working class/ethnic child rearing practices without any appreciation of their location within certain material and cultural realities) and the contradictions to be confronted by intervention programs.

The discontinuities between family and school environments are pronounced in the initiation of children into schooling systems. The social structural bases for such discontinuities as are typically found for disadvantaged children have been widely examined since the 'cultural difference' studies of the early seventies (e.g., Young, 1971).

However, there remains the need to analyse the particular patterns of parental attitudes to and perceptions of schooling programs in order to have any adequate explanation of their varying impacts on children, families and communities. Certainly analysis of value differences and the development of responsive programs will not resolve these discontinuities, dependent as they are upon broader, more pervasive features of the social system but they represent a necessary step in the rationalisation of objectives and evaluation of the outcomes of such programs.

Within the Mt. Druitt Early Childhood Project different programs have different emphases in relation to parents. While the Home-based program is something of a 'trialogue' among teachers, parents and children for goal setting/program development and evaluation, other school-based programs involve parents less directly. (Particular goals and activities are reported in the separate curriculum evaluation papers.) Expectations and perceptions of curriculum content and processes across the programs were obtained both to provide information for program development and evaluation from parents' points of view.

PARENT EXPECTATIONS-PERCEPTIONS

So that discussion might be possible, an interview format was developed where parents could state their expectations of the program at the beginning of the year and later their perceptions. Space was made for open discussion as well as a structured set of items. Opening probes preceded the structured section to allow spontaneous or prepared comment and so that particular issues or 'problems' could be taken up throughout the session.

The structured format was compiled to represent the goal behaviours for preschool aged children from three sources:

1. the major dimensions specified in the objectives of the five programs, both general developmental and particular school located skills and attitudes.
2. general developmental and specific age related behaviours.
3. the specific parental expectations of preschool programs for themselves and their children. (see Table 1).

An exhaustive list of behaviours was generated from these sources then rationalised to represent their significance and variability. Items were

Table 1 Classification of Objectives

General Developmental Objectives	
Cognitive	Logical thinking (e.g. space, time, number concepts)
	Representation - formal (e.g. language)
	- expressive (e.g. divergent production: dramatic play, creative activities)
Affective	Personal attitudes and skills (e.g. independence, confidence)
	Social attitudes and skills (e.g. cooperation, conciliation)
Psychomotor	Fine motor skills
	Gross motor skills
Specific School Objectives	
School Related Skills	Academic and social skills, styles, behaviours (e.g. shapes, letter recognition, attentiveness, body maintenance skills, obedience to rules)

grouped into a general developmental set and a specific school set.

This was not to refine necessarily independent, substantive conceptual areas but rather to classify the range of objectives to facilitate coverage and reduce redundancy. Neither were all objectives at a similar level of specificity, some taking in whole developmental areas (language), others crossing areas (school competence) and still others peculiarly idiosyncratic (argumentative), after the forms used by parents in exploratory discussions.

Items derived from each of the areas were trialled then redrafted to overcome language or conceptual difficulties. The factor analysis provided no useful basis for grouping items. Strong factors may have indicated response types of a higher order (general school competence; verbal competence, and so on) but no such factors emerged. Few substantial correlations were obtained suggesting somewhat discrete item interrelationships.

Similarly the discriminant functions obtained did not significantly differentiate among programs.

Given that all of the items already represented significant program goals no reduction or further rationalisation was attempted.

SAMPLE

One hundred parents were randomly selected from the five programs. Table 2 indicates the size of the sample. They were contacted by letter and asked to attend interviews at the preschools or to be interviewed at home at a suitable time. These arrangements were able to be quite flexible. The participation rate was high (February >90%; October >80%)

Table 2 Number of Parents Interviewed across Programs

Session	Program				
	Cognitive	Competency	Contemporary	Behaviourist	Home-Based
AM	10	10	10	10	20*
PM	10	10	10	10	

* 5 parents per teacher

which suggests the acceptability of the study for parents. Teachers were also asked to rate children on the Behaviour Inventory in October. They were also asked to rate the emphasis their programs had given to each of the areas.

PROCEDURE

Section 1: Behaviour Inventory

Parents had already been interviewed during the enrolment period in all programs and had then been asked to indicate any aspects of their child's behaviour or history which might be important for teachers to know about. To begin the PEPI session parents were asked to rate their child on each of the items (see Appendix A). This was to establish some normative base as well as to provide parents with a comprehensive set of behaviours to use in forming their expectations of preschool. This also supported the notion of deriving objectives for a particular child rather than producing some nebulous set of expected behaviours (see Messinger, 1976:11). Some notion of change in behaviour and these changes attributed to preschool attendance could also be determined from a comparison of the beginning and end of year ratings.

Section 2: Expectations (February administration)

Open: Parents were first asked the reasons for sending their children to preschool.

Structured: They were then asked to indicate, for each of the items, those they most expected to be the goals for preschool.

Perceptions (October administration)

Open: At the end of the year, after completing the behaviour ratings,

parents were asked about the ways in which preschool had influenced their children.

Structured: Again, parents identified from the listed behaviours those which they thought had been influenced.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

All open-ended responses were subjected to a content analysis to organise the information into categories, first of all to approximate the structured items and then to identify other areas. Simple tallies for the categories were then made within programs.

Frequency distributions were made for the expectation - perception inventory to obtain a ranking of items, and means were calculated for each item across sites and subjected to an analysis of variance to determine differences among programs. Similarly an analysis of variance was performed on means of items from the behaviour inventory.

RESULTS

Parents' Ratings of Behaviour

Section 1: (February administration) (Tables 3, 4)

Most parents saw their children as competent in body maintenance skills (feeding, toileting, dressing), able to understand instructions and remember things, as physically competent (able to climb, assemble things, coordinated), as good communicators, curious and imaginative. Few saw their children as shy or anxious with either other children or adults or overly dependent upon them. They were not disruptive but they were unable to plan or organise their own play and remain self-directed and controlled. They had none of the skills required for reading and writing. They were not able to listen carefully or concentrate to finish

Table 3: Parents' Ratings of Behaviour

	Item	Rank February	Rank November
46.	Feed self	1	1
38.	Understand instructions	2	9
32.	Is curious	2	6
3.	Know what things are for (tools, kitchen things)	2	4
33.	Toilets self	5	3
13.	Know sizes: bigger, smaller	5	5
36.	Can climb	7	8
50.	Remember things (recalls events, stories)	8	2
49.	Sings songs, say rhymes	8	12
52.	Ask questions (for information, to find out about things)	10	7
15.	Can assemble things (beads, jigsaw, construction sets)	11	14
39.	'Reads'/Looks at books	12	10
47.	Play make believe games	13	24
43.	Well coordinated	14	16
29.	Ask for stories (to be told, read)	15	27
23.	Can get things to work (toys, telephone)	15	29*
30.	Speak clearly	17	18
19.	Independent	18	20
1.	Communicate easily	19	19
24.	Can match things that are the same (colour, shape, size)	20	11
14.	Play imaginatively with toys	20*	15
44.	Follow directions	22	21
26.	Dress self	23	21
35.	Argumentative	24	37
5.	Can catch things (balls)	25**	21
2.	Count things	26	13
27.	Confident	27	25
53.	Make up own stories	28	33
37.	Share things (toys)	28	25
48.	Know colours (names)	30**	16
20.	Cooperative with adults	30	29*
28.	Tantrums when frustrated	32	43
54.	Get attention the right way	33	34**
4.	Concentrate on things	34**	32**
31.	Can predict outcomes of actions (If I do this then "X")	35	28
7.	Listen carefully	36	42
45.	Self controlled	37**	40
17.	Take care of belongings (clothes, toys)	38**	39
42.	Easily distracted	39	41**
22.	Finish things (tasks, puzzles)	39	38
12.	Talk about how s/he feels	41	36
55.	Dependent on mother	42	52
18.	Organise games, plays with others	43	44
25.	Can explain things (how things work, cause-effect)	44*	31*
34.	Anxious	45	46
51.	Plan , think how to do things first	46	48
21.	Shy with adults	47	50
40.	Understand about time (days, sequences)	48	46
10.	Copies letter shapes (writes name)	49	35
11.	Disrupt play with other children	50	53
9.	Draw pictures with a lot of detail	51	45
41.	Know left from right	52**	48**
8.	Know letters of the alphabet	53**	50**
16.	Prefer to play alone	54	55
6.	Shy with other children	55**	54

Differences among program means * Signif. F >.05
** Signif. F >.01

tasks. They were not altogether cooperative with adults and did not use appropriate ways of gaining their attention.

Section 1: (October administration)

Before the end of year ratings parents were asked to describe the ways in which their children had changed over the year. Parents from the Home-base and Contemporary programs were clearly the most vocal.

Many cognitive and affective behaviour changes were described. Most frequently mentioned (by more than half the parents) were particular competencies, both school-related (colours, numbers, shapes, sizes) and general developmental (self-direction, maturity) as well as language skills.

Almost as many listed increased sociability of their children, who were now less shy and able to mix better with other children. They were also more independent. Home-base parents reported more obedient behaviour. Affective and cognitive behaviours were almost as frequently listed. Negative behaviours (more argumentative, aggressive and so on) were rare (less than 5% of responses) but more frequent for both the Contemporary and Home-base programs.

Structured

Parents obviously perceive their children to have developed higher levels of skill in all of the areas listed and specifically to have developed more independent, confident and cooperative behaviours. Ratings of argumentativeness and shyness, however, remained the same.

Program Differences

Quite consistent ratings were made across the programs. At the beginning of the year only 10 of the 55 items were rated differently

Table 4: Means of Parent Ratings (Behaviour Inventory - October)

Item No.	Cognitive	Competency	Contemporary	Behaviourist	Home Base
1	3.4	3.2	2.9	3.2	3.3
2	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.3
3	4.0	3.4	3.2	3.4	3.1
4	3.4	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.0
5	3.6	3.1	3.3	3.0	2.7
6	1.9	2.1	2.0	1.6	2.1
7	3.2	2.9	2.9	3.3	2.8
8	2.5	2.5	1.4	3.7	1.3
9	3.4	2.9	2.8	2.5	2.5
10	3.3	2.8	2.7	3.1	2.1
11	1.7	2.0	1.6	2.0	1.7
12	2.9	2.6	2.4	2.8	2.4
13	3.9	3.7	3.3	3.6	3.7
14	2.7	3.1	3.0	2.6	3.5
15	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.9	3.6
16	2.3	1.9	2.0	2.0	1.6
17	3.7	2.7	3.1	3.0	2.9
18	3.4	2.5	2.6	2.9	2.8
19	3.6	3.0	3.1	3.8	3.1
20	3.4	3.1	3.2	3.7	3.2
21	2.5	2.0	2.1	1.8	2.1
22	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.7	3.1
23	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.1	3.2
24	4.0	3.6	3.7	3.9	3.7
25	3.6	3.1	2.7	2.6	2.8
26	1.8	3.7	3.8	2.7	3.3
27	3.1	3.1	2.7	3.2	3.0
28	1.5	2.0	1.8	1.4	1.8
29	2.3	3.0	2.6	2.4	3.0
30	3.8	3.2	3.1	3.6	3.1
31	3.9	3.1	2.9	2.7	2.8
32	3.4	2.9	2.9	3.2	3.1
33	4.0	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.7
34	2.1	2.6	2.3	1.8	1.8
35	1.8	2.1	1.7	1.4	2.3
36	3.9	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.0
37	3.6	2.9	3.2	3.6	2.8
38	3.9	3.4	3.3	4.0	3.4
39	3.0	3.4	3.1	2.9	3.5
40	3.7	3.0	2.6	2.9	2.1
41	3.0	2.2	4.1	4.7	2.0
42	2.3	2.2	2.5	2.1	2.6
43	3.8	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.3
44	3.6	3.2	3.2	3.9	3.1
45	3.6	2.9	3.0	3.8	3.1
46	1.8	3.4	3.9	4.0	3.8
47	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.8	3.3
48	3.6	3.4	3.7	3.4	3.5
49	3.5	3.3	2.6	3.1	3.1
50	3.8	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.1
51	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.8
52	3.4	3.0	2.8	3.2	3.2
53	2.6	2.7	2.5	2.4	3.1
54	3.5	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.0
55	2.2	1.3	2.1	1.6	1.8

(see Table 3), with both the Behaviourist and Competency programs' ratings higher than the others and Home-base program's ratings consistently lowest (for 8 of the 10).

At the end of the year, 9 items were rated differently, including 4 of the items from the first inventory. Again, on these few items, the Behaviourist and Competency programs rate consistently higher than the other programs and Home-base ratings lower on all 9.

Section 2: (February administration)

Expectations (Table 5)

Open: Parents most wanted opportunities for contact with other children so that their children might become less shy, more confident and better able to cooperate with others.

They expected preschool to facilitate children's cognitive development and make some start at skill teaching. Preschool resources - facilities, equipment and trained teachers with different skills and ideas were valued. The slow ease into the schooling environment was expected to be an important preparation for 'formal' schooling.

Some doubts about the possible effects of preschool were expressed ("might not work out", "child might be too young to cope with separation", "five days might be too many at this age").

Program Differences

Parents more frequently listed social objectives for the programs than others, except Home-base. Cognitive/school related objectives were rated lower (see Messinger, 1976). Preparation for school was also seen to be important, especially by Home-base parents.

Table 5: Expectations and Perceptions of Preschool

	Item	Total % Response Expectations	Rank		Perceptions
7.	Listen carefully	96.8*	1	11	76.8
38.	Understand instructions	95.8	2	1	92.6
4.	Concentration	94.7	3	21	68.4
3.	Know what things are for	93.7	4	6	84.2
16.	Cooperative play	91.6	5	11	76.8
2.	Counting	90.5*	6	6	84.2
45.	Self control	90.5	6	34	56.8
49.	Sing	90.5	6	4	91.6
1.	Communication	89.5	9	14	75.8
43.	Coordination	89.5	9	34	56.8
44.	Obedience	89.5	9	37	53.7
48.	Identification of colours	89.5	9	9	81.1
27.	Confidence	88.4	13	8	82.1
42.	Distractability (less)	88.4	13	41	48.4
22.	Finish things	86.3	15	24	65.3
24.	Match things	86.3	15	1	92.6
25.	Explain things	86.3	15	5	87.4
41.	Left/right discrimination	86.3	15	46	41.1
17.	Care for things	85.3	19	41	48.4
28.	Tantrums (less)	85.3*	19	41	48.4
37.	Share	85.3*	19	20	68.4
52.	Ask questions	85.3	19	9	81.1
30.	Speak clearly	84.2	23	36	54.7
54.	Get attention right way	84.2	23	49	38.9
12.	Talk about feelings	83.2**	25	37	53.7
20.	Cooperate with adults	83.2	25	30	62.1
40.	Understand time	83.2	25	33	57.9*
50.	Remember things	83.2*	25	17	72.6
51.	Plans	83.2	25	27	63.2
8.	Letters of alphabet	82.1	30	44	43.2
10.	Copy letter shapes	81.1	31	22	67.4
15.	Assemble things	81.1	31	11	76.8
13.	Know sizes	80.0	33	1	92.6
23.	Get things to work	80.0	33	19	69.5
29.	Ask for stories	80.0	33	27	63.2
31.	Prediction	80.0	33	22	67.4
39.	'Read' books	80.0	33	14	75.8
19.	Independence	78.9*	38	18	71.6
11.	Disruptive (less)	73.7	39	46	41.1
53.	Make up stories	72.6*	40	30	62.1*
14.	Imaginative play	70.5	41	30	62.1*
35.	Argumentative (less)	69.5	42	53	23.2
55.	Dependence on mother (less)	67.0	43	14	75.8
6.	Shy with children (less)	65.3**	44	40	51.6
32.	Curiosity	65.3**	44	24	65.3
5.	Catch	62.1	46	48	40.0
34.	Anxiety (less)	62.1	46	51	35.8
26.	Dress self	63.2	48	52	30.5
21.	Shy with adults (less)	58.9*	49	44	43.2
47.	Play make believe games	58.9	49	24	65.3
18.	Organise games	56.8	51	39	52.6
33.	Toilet self	53.7**	52	54	20.0
9.	Draw detailed pictures	47.4	53	27	63.2**
46.	Feed self	47.4**	53	55	13.7
36.	Climb	27.4*	55	50	37.9**

Differences across sites * F >.05, ** F >.01

% Response rate >75%

Note 16 items response rate >75%, perceived effect of preschool
3 items no response rate >75%, perceived effect of preschool

Structured

Parents were definite about the types of learning and behavioural styles and skills they expected preschool to develop.

Attention styles were rated highly (concentration, listening, non-distractibility, perseverance) as well as general cognitive skills (understanding instructions, understanding what things are for, explanation, communication). Socialisation for cooperation and conformity was also expected (cooperative play, self-control, obedience, reduced tantrums, sharing, getting attention appropriately, cooperation with adults). Some specific content was expected: number, singing, coordination, colour identification, left/right discrimination and speech, but this was seen within a broad and flexible perspective, some notion of 'appropriate' content for these children at this time. Traditional content (beginning mathematics, reading, writing) was given a more moderate emphasis. The Bank Street Interview (1973) obtained similar emphasis for traditional/academic content, but for lower expectations of social/personal development.

Generally psychomotor, body maintenance and divergent/play activities were the lowest rated (toilet, feed, dress self; climb, catch; draw pictures, play make believe games, curiosity, imaginative play, make up stories).

Program Differences

Sixteen of the 55 items were rated differently across the programs. The Behaviourist, Competency and Contemporary programs rate higher on most of these than the Cognitive program, and Home-base rated lowest on 13 of the items.

It is clear that expectations of preschool are affected by children's particular behaviours and skills and are not simple reproductions of

acceptable values. Children are seen to be competent in body maintenance skills so these are given low priorities for a preschool program, as are play and expressive activities. The skills seen to be undeveloped - careful listening, concentration and perseverance with tasks - have priority. Similarly, an emphasis on the socialisation of children into more cooperative interactions with other children and adults is valued highly. The traditional content areas remain only moderately important for children of this age.

Section 2: (October administration)

Perceptions (Table 6)

Open

In contrast to their expectations parents rated cognitive skills (logical and school-related), styles (concentration, perseverance) and language skills to have been most affected by preschool. Personal skills (independence, confidence, assertiveness) and social skills (cooperation) were also developed. Parents of children in the Contemporary program particularly mentioned traditional preschool areas (craft, puzzles, games, songs, rhymes) while Home-base parents were most aware of the preparation for school which the program provided.

Structured

Preschool was seen to have substantial effects over the range of children's behaviours and skills. Not all changes noticed over the year were seen to result from preschool attendance, but preschool improved children's confidence, their ability to understand instructions and make explanations. They asked more questions and were able to listen more carefully. They had developed increased school abilities - number,

Table 6: Perceptions of Preschool

	Item	%	Rank	Difference Between Expectation-Perception Ranks
13.	Know sizes	92.6	1	+32**
24.	Match things	92.6	1	+14*
38.	Understand instructions	92.6	1	+ 1
49.	Sing	91.6	4	+ 2
25.	Explain things	87.4	5	+10*
2.	Counting	84.2	6	0
3.	Know what things are for	84.2	6	- 2
27.	Confidence	82.1	8	+ 5
48.	Identification of colours	81.1	9	0
52.	Ask questions	81.1	9	+10*
7.	Listen carefully	76.8	11	-11*
15.	Assemble things	76.8	11	+20**
16.	Cooperative play	76.8	11	- 6
55.	Dependence (less)	75.8	14	+29**
1.	Communication	75.8	14	- 5
39.	Read books	75.8	14	+19*
50.	Remember things	72.6	17	+ 8
19.	Independence	71.6	18	+20**
23.	Get things to work	70.5	19	+14*
37.	Share	69.5	20	- 1
4.	Concentration	68.4	21	-18*
10.	Copy letter shapes	67.4	22	+ 9
31.	Predict outcomes	67.4	22	+11*
32.	Curious	65.3	24	+20**
47.	Make believe games	65.3	24	+25**
22.	Finishes things	65.3	24	- 9
51.	Plans	63.2	27	- 2
29.	Ask for stories	63.2	27	+ 6
9.	Detailed pictures	63.2	27	+26**
14.	Imaginative play	62.1	30	+11*
53.	Make up stories	62.1	30	+10*
20.	Cooperative with adults	62.1	30	- 5
40.	Understand time	57.9	33	- 8
43.	Coordination	56.8	34	-25**
45.	Self control	56.8	34	-28**
30.	Speak clearly	54.7	36	-13*
12.	Talk about feelings	53.7	37	-12*
44.	Obedience	53.7	37	-28**
18.	Organise games	52.6	39	+12*
6.	Shy with children	51.6	40	+ 4
42.	Distractability (less)	48.4	41	-28**
17.	Care of things	48.4	41	-22**
28.	Tantrums	48.4	41	-22**
21.	Shy with adults	43.2	44	+ 5
8.	Alphabet	43.2	44	-14*
41.	Left/right	41.1	46	-31**
11.	Disruptive (less)	41.1	46	- 7
5.	Catch things	40.0	48	- 2
54.	Get attention the right way	38.0	49	-26**
36.	Climb	47.9	50	+ 5
34.	Anxious (less)	35.8	51	- 5
26.	Dress self	30.5	52	- 4
35.	Argumentative (less)	23.2	53	-11*
33.	Toilet self	20.0	54	- 2
46.	Feed self	13.7	55	- 2

* Differences >10
** Differences >20

singing, colour recognition and were more interested in looking at books and listening to stories. They were more cooperative with adults, although less dependent upon them and more sharing with other children. They became more curious and interested in make-believe games and they could concentrate and persevere with tasks for longer periods.

Parents rated cognitive style/process development over content and skill acquisition, as they had expected.

Program Differences

Whereas expectations differed across programs for 16/55 items perceptions were much more consistent. Only 4/55 items (9, 14, 36, 53) attained significance and these all had low priority, rendering such significance of little practical consequence. Clearly, given the more divergent expectations of parents across programs at the beginning of the year and the minimal divergence at the end there are no substantial differential effects on the perceptions of parents of the different programs. The impact of the preschool experience has been to sensitise parents to cognitive/school-related objectives substituting them for their previous personal/social priorities. While the range of skills and behaviours is still wide within groups, the impact of preschool across groups is consistently perceived, and valued by parents.

Most unexpected for preschool was the increased independence children displayed and their increase in imaginative play (see Messinger, 1976:21).

Preschool had little effect on the body maintenance skills already acquired and was ineffective in reducing argumentativeness or teaching

appropriate attention getting strategies, contrary to parents' expectations. No changes in obedience or tantrum behaviour were perceived, nor did children take more care of their belongings. Some content areas, too, were little affected - knowing letters of the alphabet, speech clarity, left/right discrimination, coordination.

The interview format of PEPI raises some problems for interpretation. Although the items may be representative some parents responded differently to the structured set from the open probes. For example, although Home-based parents were more spontaneously detailed and enthusiastic about the Home-based program (open), when asked to rate some behaviours (structured) they rated lower than school-based programs. Perhaps the very individual, ongoing discussion between Home-based teachers and parents has established more specific, immediate priorities. Or, the impacts of the program may be somewhat outside the child focussed developmental/ school areas covered in PEPI. (Home-based teachers, too, rated fewer consistent priority areas from the inventory than school-based teachers, see Table 10).

When asked in the October interview what were the most important things preschool should have done most parents reiterated general social objectives (especially contact with other children, independence/from mother). Language/communication skills were mentioned as were some cognitive/school skills (numbers, letters). Only two parents suggested particular things that should have been taught (reading associated skills) while some mentioned that more had been achieved than they had expected.

When asked about their expectations for Kindergarten, most parents

mentioned academic objectives (read, write, count) then social objectives (especially discipline, compliance, cooperation). Several people commented that certain structural constraints upon teachers and schools (class size, facilities) were probably significant in determining the frequency and type of parent/child/teacher interaction, individualised programs, effective intervention for children with special needs.

PEPI items represent specific goals of each of the programs. As such parents' initial rankings of the goals and ratings of the children's behaviour provide an important perspective. To enable teachers to consider parents' expectations in developing programs, group data from the first interview session was analysed and discussed. The usefulness of this procedure varied. The Home-based teachers used the information to plan some aspects of their approach and as a general starting point for systematic discussion of a range of developmental and school issues (see Home-base, Annual Report, 1977). Some school-based teachers used the information as background for sessions with parents discussing differences between parent expectations and program objectives.

Parent ratings of children's behaviour were perhaps more interesting to the school-based teachers with more definite competency orientations. Similarities and differences between parent and teacher ratings of behaviours were discussed. Observation sessions and evaluation strategies were planned by some teachers to work with parents.

Section 3:

Parent focussed expectations-perceptions

Open

School-based parents reported far fewer benefits to themselves directly than home-based parents. Unlike the Messinger (1976) findings, parents

expected only indirect benefits to themselves.

Home-based parents said they were better teachers, more able to manage their children, were more interested in them, understood them better and spent more time now with them, and were glad of the chance to meet regularly with teachers and other parents.

Many school-based parents found they had more time to themselves or for other children, while some enjoyed the break from children and were happy about the child's new found independence and interests. Others missed the constancy of contact and felt more isolated in the community. Some mentioned the organisational difficulties involved in taking and collecting their children from preschool.

Structured (Table 7)

Parents were keen to see their child coping with the preschool situation before beginning schooling. They felt that preschool did prepare their children for schooling. Most also expected to learn more about children through their involvement and said that this had happened. Further, they highly valued the skills of teachers.

Home-based parents found that they were involved in school organisation more than parents at other centres who found themselves less involved than they had anticipated. Some parents had more help than they expected in coping with problems associated with their children.

Section 4: Teachers' Ratings (Table 8)

Behaviour Inventory

Teachers rate children highest on body maintenance skills (feeding, toileting and dressing). They know sizes, colours, can match and assemble things. They are well coordinated. Teachers also found most children to be cooperative and obedient.

Table 7: % Parent Focussed Expectations: February - October

Item	Cognitive		Competency		Contemporary		Behaviourist		Home-Base	
1. Child less dependent	50.0	50.0*	63.2	84.2	77.3	68.2	86.7	66.7	69.6	82.6
2. Time to self	37.5	43.8	26.3	52.6	68.2	45.5	53.3	53.3	34.8	65.2
3. Involvement in school/organisation	56.3	37.5	57.9	21.1	54.5	36.4	53.3	40.0	39.1	65.2*
4. Help coping with child	37.5	37.5	36.8	42.1	50.0	54.5	53.3	40.0	56.5	78.3*
5. Trained teachers	68.8	75.0	94.7	78.9	90.9	90.9	86.7	100.0	82.6	91.3
6. Time for others in family	6.3	18.8*	36.8	31.6	45.5	63.6	40.0	46.7	34.8	52.2
7. Learn about children	87.5	87.5	94.7	68.4	86.4	72.7	100.0	93.3	95.7	91.3
8. Work possibility	6.3	6.3	5.3	10.5	9.1	4.5	33.3	0.0	13.0	0.0
9. Trial schooling	81.3	87.5	94.7	94.7	100.0	95.5	100.0	93.3	91.3	95.7
10. Preparation for school	87.5	93.8	100.0	100.0	95.5	95.5	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 8: Teachers' Ratings of Behaviour

	Items	Rank	Mean
33.	Toilets self	1	3.89
13.	Knows sizes: bigger, smaller	2	3.80
24.	Can match things that are the same	3	3.78
48.	Knows colours (names)	4	3.61
46.	Feeds self	5	3.55
38.	Understands instructions	6	3.54
15.	Can assemble things (beads, jigsaw)	7	3.53
36.	Can climb	8	3.46
2.	Counts things	9	3.44
3.	Knows what things are for	10	3.43
43.	Well coordinated	11	3.40
26.	Dresses self	11	3.40
22.	Finishes things (tasks, puzzles)	13	3.37
44.	Follows directions	14	3.34
20.	Cooperative with adults	15	3.32
30.	Speaks clearly	16	3.30
50.	Remembers things	17	3.29
4.	Concentrates on things	18	3.28
41.	Knows left from right	19	3.27
23.	Can get things to work	20	3.25
19.	Independent	20	3.25
39.	'Reads'/Looks at books	20	3.25
54.	Gets attention the right way	23	3.22
45.	Self controlled	23	3.22
37.	Shares things (toys)	25	3.21
5.	Can catch things (balls)	25	3.21
1.	Communicates easily	25	3.21
49.	Sings songs, says rhymes	28	3.11
52.	Asks questions	29	3.10
31.	Can predict outcomes of actions	30	3.08
51.	Plans, thinks how to do things first	30	3.08
32.	Is curious	32	3.07
47.	Plays make believe games	32	3.07
17.	Takes care of belongings (clothes, toys)	34	3.06
14.	Plays imaginatively with toys	35	3.04
7.	Listens carefully	36	3.02
27.	Confident	37	3.01
25.	Can explain things	38	2.97
40.	Understands about time	39	2.87
9.	Draws pictures with a lot of detail	40	2.85
10.	Copies letter shapes (writes names)	41	2.83
29.	Asks for stores (to be told, read)	42	2.77
18.	Organises games, plays with others	43	2.75
4.	Concentrates on things	44	2.70
12.	Talks about how s/he feels	45	2.63
42.	Easily distracted	46	2.39
34.	Anxious	47	2.27
8.	Knows letters of the alphabet	48	2.13
21.	Shy with adults	49	2.11
6.	Shy with other children	50	2.04
16.	Prefers to play alone	51	1.98
35.	Argumentative	52	1.92
55.	Dependent on mother	53	1.86
11.	Disrupts play with other children	54	1.84
28.	Tantrums when frustrated	55	1.81

Generally teachers rated competencies at lower levels than parents, and there were some considerable discrepancies (Table 9). However, almost half of the items were closely rated (less than 5 ranks difference), while two-thirds were similarly rated (less than 10 ranks difference).

The teachers' lowest rankings were for the set of 'negative' or 'problem' behaviours (anxiety, argumentativeness, distractability, disruptive and dependent behaviour). Teachers seem to have a more positive set then parents for these behaviours. This may be because of teacher management skills or authority (argumentativeness, disruptive behaviour) and the swamping certain individual 'problems' in the class group context (anxiety, dependence).

PROGRAM EMPHASES (Table 10)

Teachers were asked to indicate their perceptions of the emphases their programs gave to the areas covered in the inventory.

Teachers from the Behaviourist and Competency programs indicated more than 20 of 55 areas to have received maximum emphasis ($\bar{x}$ >3.5) while the Home-based and Cognitive programs listed very few (less than 10 of 55).

Clearly the programs with highly structured content focussed more explicitly on the particular skills listed. The outcomes of such effort can be determined by reference to specific evaluation of some of these areas. Generally the priority areas match the goal statements for the programs. Thus, the Contemporary program emphasises traditional content as well as open (divergent) styles. The Behaviourist program emphasises a range of skills and styles but is less open and more directed than the Contemporary program.

Table 9: Behaviour Inventory: Parent-Teacher Ratings - November

	Item	Parents Rank	Parents Mean	Teachers Mean	Teachers Rank
46.	Feeds self	1	3.97	3.55	5
50.	Remembers things (recalls events, stories)	2	3.93	3.29	17
33.	Toilets self	3	3.92	3.89	1
3.	Knows what things are for	4	3.91	3.43*	10
13.	Knows sizes	5	3.89	3.80	2
32.	Is curious	6	3.87	3.07	32
52.	Asks questions	7	3.84	3.10	29
36.	Can climb	8	3.83	3.46	8
38.	Understands instructions	9	3.81	3.54	6
39.	'Reads'/Looks at books	10	3.80	3.25	20
24.	Can match things that are the same	11	3.79	3.78	3
49.	Sings songs, says rhymes	12	3.78	3.11	28
2.	Counts things	13	3.76	3.44	9
15.	Can assemble things	14	3.72	3.53	7
14.	Plays imaginatively with toys	15	3.71	3.04	35
48.	Knows colours (names)	16	3.64	3.61	4
43.	Well coordinated	16	3.64	3.40	11
30.	Speaks clearly	18	3.63	3.30	16
1.	Communicates easily	19	3.62	3.21	25
19.	Independent	20	3.60	3.25	20
44.	Follows directions	21	3.58	3.37	14
26.	Dresses self	21	3.58	3.40	11
5.	Can catch things (balls)	21	3.58	3.21	25
47.	Plays make believe games	24	3.56	3.07	32
37.	Shares things (toys)	25	3.51	3.21	25
27.	Confident	25	3.51	3.01	37
29.	Asks for stories (to be told, read)	27	3.43	2.77	42
31.	Can predict outcomes of actions	28	3.34	3.08	30
23.	Can get things to work (toys, telephone)	29	3.33	3.25	20
20.	Cooperative with adults	29	3.33	3.32	15
25.	Can explain things	31	3.25	2.97	38
4.	Concentrates on things	32	3.23	3.28	18
53.	Makes up own stories	33	3.21	2.70	44
54.	Gets attention the right way	34	3.17	3.22	23
10.	Copies letter shapes (writes name)	35	3.13	2.83	41
12.	Talks about how s/he feels	36	3.12	2.63	45
35.	Argumentative	37	3.09	1.92	52
22.	Finishes things (tasks, puzzles)	38	3.08	3.34	14
17.	Takes care of belongings (clothes, toys)	39	2.98	3.06	34
45.	Self controlled	40	2.96	3.22	23
42.	Easily distracted	41	2.96	2.39	46
7.	Listens carefully	42	2.93	3.02	36
28.	Tantrums when frustrated	43	2.68	1.81	55
18.	Organises games, plays with others	44	2.67	2.75	43
9.	Draws pictures with a lot of detail	45	2.58	2.85	40
40.	Understands about time	46	2.56	2.87	39
34.	Anxious	46	2.56	2.27	47
51.	Plans, thinks how to do things first	48	2.46	3.08	30
41.	Knows left from right	48	2.46	3.27	19
21.	Shy with adults	50	2.43	2.11	49
8.	Knows letters of the alphabet	50	2.43	2.13	48
55.	Dependent on mother	52	2.33	1.86	53
11.	Disrupts play with other children	53	2.15	1.84	54
6.	Shy with other children	54	1.82	2.04	50
16.	Prefers to play alone	55	1.78	1.98	51

Table 10: Program Emphasis

What emphasis has your program given to the following areas? (Maximum 4.0, Minimum 1.0)

	Cognitive	Competency	Contemporary	Behaviourist	Home-Base
1. Communication	3.2	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
2. Counting (things)	3.4	2.3	1.5	4.0	3.0
3. Knowing what things are for	3.4	3.5	2.3	3.7	2.2
4. Concentration	3.0	3.3	2.5	3.7	3.0
5. Ability to catch	1.6	2.5	2.0	2.7	1.3
6. Shyness with other children (less)	2.3	3.5	3.3	3.0	2.8
7. Ability to listen carefully	3.6	3.5	3.0	4.0	3.2
8. Knowing the letters of the alphabet	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.5	1.0
9. Ability to draw pictures with a lot of detail	3.2	2.3	1.8	1.3	1.2
10. Ability to copy letter shapes, write names, words	2.8	3.5	1.0	2.0	1.0
11. Disruption of other children	3.6	3.5	4.0	3.0	1.8
12. Talk about feelings (how he/she feels about things)	3.4	3.0	3.3	3.3	2.6
13. Understanding of sizes, bigger/smaller	4.0	4.0	2.8	4.0	2.8
14. Imaginative play with toys	2.2	3.3	3.7	3.0	2.6
15. Ability to assemble things	2.8	3.5	3.7	3.3	2.0
16. Cooperative play with other children	3.0	4.0	3.7	3.7	2.6
17. Carefulness (with clothes, toys and things)	2.2	3.5	3.3	3.7	2.4
18. Ability to organise games, play with other children	3.0	3.7	2.5	3.0	2.0
19. Independence	3.8	3.7	3.7	4.0	3.8
20. Cooperation with adults	3.4	2.8	3.5	4.0	2.8
21. Shyness with adults (less shy)	2.8	3.3	3.7	3.0	4.0
22. Perseverence, finishing things (tasks, puzzles)	3.4	3.3	3.7	3.7	2.6
23. Ability to work things (phone, toys)	2.6	2.8	2.3	3.7	2.4
24. Ability to match things that are the same (colour, shape)	3.8	4.0	2.5	4.0	3.4
25. Ability to explain things (how they work, how they should go together)	3.0	3.0	2.0	3.0	3.0
26. Ability to dress self	1.6	2.8	2.8	3.0	3.0
27. Confidence	3.0	4.0	4.0	3.0	3.2
28. Ability to cope with frustration	2.6	3.3	3.7	1.7	2.6
29. Interest in stories, books	3.2	3.7	3.3	3.7	3.2
30. Speech (clarity)	2.6	3.7	3.0	3.7	2.8
31. Ability to predict the outcomes of actions	3.2	2.5	2.0	1.7	2.4
32. Curiosity	3.0	2.8	3.5	2.5	3.0
33. Ability to use the toilet	1.5	2.8	2.0	2.3	1.8
34. Anxiety (less anxious)	2.8	3.5	3.7	2.5	2.6
35. Argumentatitveness (less argumentative)	1.6	2.5	3.0	3.7	1.0
36. Ability to climb	2.4	2.8	2.3	3.0	1.4
37. Sharing	3.4	4.0	3.7	4.0	3.2
38. Understanding of instructions (how to do things)	3.6	3.5	2.0	4.0	3.4
39. Ability to 'read' books, talk about the stories, pictures in books	3.0	2.8	3.0	4.0	2.8
40. Understanding of time (days of the week, sequence)	4.0	1.8	1.8	2.0	2.0
41. Understanding left and right	1.0	2.0	1.2	3.0	1.2
42. Distractability (less distractable)	2.8	2.8	2.5	3.7	3.0
43. Coordination	2.4	3.5	2.5	3.3	3.4
44. Obedience to directions (more obedient)	2.4	3.7	2.8	4.0	2.0
45. Self control	3.4	3.0	3.5	3.7	2.0
46. Ability to feed self	1.0	1.8	1.0	1.7	1.4
47. Playing make believe games	2.4	3.0	3.7	2.3	2.4
48. Identification (naming) of colours	3.6	4.0	3.0	4.0	2.8
49. Singing songs, rhymes	3.8	3.5	2.5	3.7	1.8
50. Memory (things that happen, stories)	3.6	3.0	1.8	3.7	2.8
51. Ability to make plans	4.0	3.0	1.8	2.5	2.0
52. Question asking (for information)	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.0	3.2
53. Ability to make up own stories	3.0	2.3	1.5	1.7	2.0
54. Ways of getting attention (better ways)	3.2	3.3	3.7	4.0	3.0
55. Dependence on mother (less)	2.2	3.3	2.8	3.3	3.2

There is greater consistency among teachers in the content structured programs (Behaviourist and Competency) and much less in the Cognitive and Home-based programs.

The relationship between program emphases and parent ratings of behaviour can be examined by comparing Tables 8 and 4.

SUMMARY

Expectations-Perceptions

Preschool Effects

Parents most expected preschool to develop a range of social behaviours (cooperation, compliance) and then certain cognitive/academic skills (communication, explanation, counting, prediction, and so on).

Although most ratings of the effects of preschool were below what parents had expected they nevertheless remained quite high and priorities were mostly met. Cognitive/academic effects were the most obvious, while communication skills and compliant styles were least affected.

The PEPI interview has provided some clear indications of the ways parents view preschool programs. Their expectations, based on children's skills and styles, should be known by teachers if some consistency of goals and strategies is important. Further it enables program development to become an interactive process where priorities can be determined and worked for in the confidence of a certain home and school consistency.

The efficacy or arbitrariness of school objectives can be evaluated in a broader, more representative context. Likewise, parents are given a wider set of objectives and strategies to consider and the merits of other ways and means can be considered. Open discussion of the issues involved in curriculum development has the potential to generate responsive rationale and evaluation criteria.

The preschool situation is viable for such schemes. Press for particular outcomes has not yet ossified. At the same time the preschool location, in some ways outside the schooling mainstream, may remain exceptional in its responsiveness. Consolidating the legitimacy of initial interactive processes is therefore necessary at the outset if broad based, responsive programs are to be maintained.

In their study of the persistence of preschool effects, Lazar et al. (1977), interviewing parents ten years after their children's preschool experience, reported consistently positive comment (Home-based - 100%, and centre-based - 93). Schooling advantages for these children were found to be significant.

Although the interactions between parent attitudes and schooling outcomes are no doubt complex, some obvious indication of home/school consistency can be had from the amount and type of parent involvement in schooling. Some of these issues are to be explored within the Mt. Druitt Early Childhood Project in the next phase of the study to investigate the relationships among program variables, parent attitudes and involvement styles and outcomes for children.

Appendix A

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P.E.P.I. BEHAVIOUR INVENTORY

PARENT: How do you think your child has developed over the year? In what ways have you seen her/him change?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Would you say for each of these statements whether you think your child is not at all like that (1), not much like that (2), something like that (3), very much like that (4).

	unlike		like	
1. Communicates easily	1	2	3	4
2. Counts things				
3. Knows what things are for (tools, kitchen things)				
4. Concentrates on things				
5. Can catch things (balls)				
6. Shy with other children				
7. Listens carefully				
8. Knows letters of the alphabet				
9. Draws pictures with a lot of detail				
10. Copies letter shapes (writes name)				
11. Disrupts play with other children				
12. Talks about how s/he feels				
13. Knows sizes: bigger, smaller				
14. Plays imaginatively with toys				
15. Can assemble things (beads, jigsaw, construction sets)				
16. Prefers to play alone				
17. Takes care of belongings (clothes, toys)				
18. Organises games, play with others				
19. Independent				
20. Cooperative with adults				
21. Shy with adults				
22. Finishes things (tasks, puzzles)				
23. Can get things to work (toys, telephone)				
24. Can match things that are the same (colour, shape, size)				
25. Can explain things (how things work, cause-effect)				
26. Dresses self				
27. Confident				
28. Tantrums when frustrated				
29. Asks for stories (to be told, read)				
30. Speaks clearly				
31. Can predict outcomes of actions ("If I do this then X")				
32. Is curious				
33. Toilets self				
34. Anxious				
35. Argumentative				
36. Can climb				
37. Shares things (toys)				
38. Understands instructions				
39. "Reads"/Looks at books				
40. Understands about time (days, sequences)				

	unlike			like
	1	2	3	4
41. Knows left from right				
42. Easily distracted				
43. Well coordinated				
44. Follows directions				
45. Self controlled				
46. Feeds self				
47. Plays make believe games				
48. Knows colours (names)				
49. Sings songs, says rhymes				
50. Remembers things (recalls events, stories)				
51. Plans, thinks how to do things first				
52. Asks questions (for information, to find out about things)				
53. Makes up own stories				
54. Gets attention the right way				
55. Dependent on mother				

PARENT: What effects would you say preschool has had on your child, if any? _____

_____

_____

_____

Which of the following things, if any, has preschool affected for your child?

1. communication
2. counting (things)
3. knowing what things are for
4. concentration
5. ability to catch
6. shyness with other children (less)
7. ability to listen carefully
8. knowing the letters of the alphabet
9. ability to draw pictures with a lot of detail
10. ability to copy letter shapes, write names, words
11. disruption of other children
12. talk about feelings (how s/he feels about things)
13. understanding of sizes, bigger/smaller
14. imaginative play with toys
15. ability to assemble things
16. cooperative play with other children
17. carefulness (with clothes, toys and things)
18. ability to organize games, play with other children
19. independence
20. cooperation with adults
21. shyness with adults (less shy)
22. perseverence, finishing things (tasks, puzzles)
23. ability to work things (phone, toys)
24. ability to match things that are the same (colour, shape)
25. ability to explain things (how they work, how they should go together)
26. ability to dress self
27. confidence
28. ability to cope with frustration
29. interest in stories, books
30. speech (clarity)

31. ability to predict the outcomes of actions
32. curiosity
33. ability to use the toilet
34. anxiety (less anxious)
35. argumentativeness (less argumentative)
36. ability to climb
37. sharing
38. understanding of instructions (hos to do things)
39. ability to 'read' books, talk about the stories, pictures in books
40. understanding of time (days of the week, sequence)
41. understanding left and right
42. distractability (less distractable)
43. coordination
44. obedience to directions (more obedient)
45. self control
46. ability to feed self
47. playing make believe games
48. identification (naming) of colours
49. singing songs, rhymes
50. memory (things that happen, stories)
51. ability to make plans
52. question asking (for information)
53. ability to make up own stories
54. ways of getting attention (better ways)
55. dependence on mother (less)

PARENT: In looking back, what would you say were the most important things preschool should have done for your child? Did it?

_____

_____

_____

For next year, what would you say are the most important things Kindergarten should do for your child?

_____

_____

_____

Do you think a kindergarten program should be much the same as the preschool? How different?

_____

_____

_____

What would you say were the most important effects on you in sending your child to preschool?

_____

_____

_____

Which, if any, of the following statements do you think were most important for you?

1. to have child less dependent
2. to have some time to myself
3. to get involved in some organization in the area
4. to have help in coping with child
5. having child taught by trained teachers
6. having more time for other people in family
7. to learn more about children and how they learn
8. to make it easier for me to go out to work
9. to be able to see how child would cope with school
10. to better prepare the child for school

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